

Recognizing Acts of Compassion and the Support of a Community

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Madame Speaker, Make no mistake about it: what we do in this chamber, the decisions we make as Members of Congress, have far-reaching implications for the Americans we represent and people around the world. I sometimes worry, though, that citizens look first to government to solve problems rather than searching within themselves for the power to make a difference. I'd like to share with you a story about one family that proves the way we change the world happens one person at a time.

Over the last several months, I have had the privilege of assisting a professor and his family attempt to make our world a better place. Dr. John Simmons, a life sciences instructor at Barton County Community College in Great Bend, Kansas and his wife Lori, along with their four biological children, will travel to Ethiopia at the end of this month to adopt two orphaned sisters.

Famine, AIDS and other diseases have created a sad situation in Ethiopia where 25 percent of the children are orphaned by age 12. While orphanages do their best to provide for these children and see that young girls and boys have a bright future, what these children really need

is a mom and dad who will care for them as their own. Few acts are more generous and loving than welcoming another as part of one's own family. I have great respect for the Simmonses and all those who choose to adopt.

While adopting two young girls is alone commendable, what sets John and Lori apart is their effort serve other children at the orphanage and involve the Great Bend community in that mission.

This summer, John launched a fundraising effort to feed and clothe children at the orphanage, purchase humanitarian supplies and pay for their shipping costs. John's goal of raising \$10,000 was accomplished primarily by selling "Barton to Africa" t-shirts for \$30 each. The shirts were printed with "Barton" in Ethiopia's official language on the front and a map of the United States on the back with a star in the center of the country, marking Barton County, Kansas. John even created more excitement for the fundraiser by promising to shave his head if the community helped him reach his goal by November 8.

After nearly five months of speaking with civic clubs, church members, neighbors, colleagues and students, John exceeded his fundraising goal and at halftime of a Barton County Community College basketball game, he and Barton County Community College Admissions Representative Louie Ochoa had their heads shaved.

I imagine most people would rest on such an accomplishment. But, John dreams of more. It is his hope that the trip to Ethiopia this month will be the beginning of a long-lasting relationship between Ethiopians and the citizens of Great Bend who joined him in his effort. John envisions providing orphans with educational opportunities at Barton County Community College. Doing so would not only offer disadvantaged children a brighter future but also further facilitate relationships between Kansans and Ethiopians.

John's fundraising effort raised awareness about the needs of others in a far corner of the world. It galvanized the community around a common goal and showed that when people work together, there is no limit on what can be accomplished.

I rise today to commend and congratulate John and Lori Simmons, their family and the citizens of Great Bend. Their compassion and effort will help make the lives of orphaned children in Ethiopia better.